Advice on NIH SBIR & STTR Grant Applications – Electronic Applications

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Hello, I am Gregory Milman. In this presentation I provide advice on preparation and submission of electronic NIH SBIR and STTR grant applications. This presentation was updated in June 2006. Send your comments, suggestions, and criticisms to gmilman@niaid.nih.gov.

Mandate for NIH Electronic Application

- Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
  - Designated Grants.gov as single interface for all grant programs offered by 26 federal grant-making agencies.
  - Required agencies to post 75% of opportunities on Grants.gov by FY2006.
- NIH and other HHS extramural research funding agencies use the eRA Commons, the NIH electronic Research Administration system for grants.
- Grants.gov and the eRA Commons have separate registration and validation requirements.

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The push to electronic application started when the Office of Management and Budget mandated Grants.gov to be the one-stop site for organizations submitting grant applications to 26 federal agencies. NIH is currently integrating application submission through Grants.gov with its existing system, the eRA Commons. Because each system has different validation processes, an NIH application accepted by Grants.gov may be rejected by the eRA Commons. Therefore, applicants must understand both Grants.gov and eRA Commons application processes and requirements.

Electronic Application and Submission – Advantages and Disadvantages

- Advantages
  - Paperless.
  - Better data quality.
  - Grant image is consistent, clear, and in color.
  - Cost reductions for scanning, printing, and data-entry.
  - Efficiencies may allow NIH to shorten the cycle from application receipt to award.
- Disadvantages
  - You must use two different systems: Grants.gov and NIH eRA Commons.
  - Business rules will change.
  - Learning new processes is difficult for both users and help desks.
  - Computers are less flexible than people!

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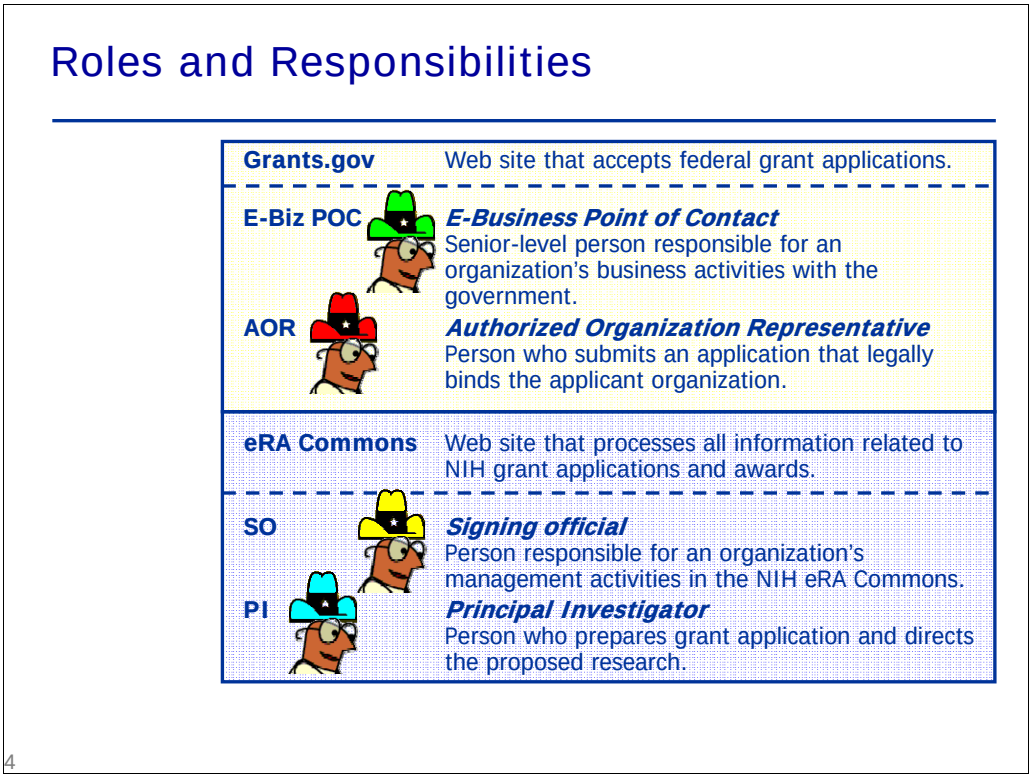
Electronic application has many potential advantages over paper application. First, it's more efficient. Applicants no longer duplicate and send multiple copies of their grant applications. Second, electronic submission is better quality. Form-based data transfers to NIH and ultimately to peer reviewers exactly as you view it on your computer screen, and you can use color. Third, both applicants and NIH save on costs. Finally, efficiencies in receipt, referral, and review may eventually allow NIH to shorten the time between application receipt and award.

There are some disadvantages of electronic application. You must cope with two computer systems with different rules. Another headache is the need for new business rules at NIH and in applicant organizations. Finally, computers rigidly apply rules so a simple typo can cause rejection of your application.

You should expect ongoing process changes as NIH and outside organizations adapt to electronic application. Meanwhile, this presentation gives you the basics you need now. I will revise it as changes occur.



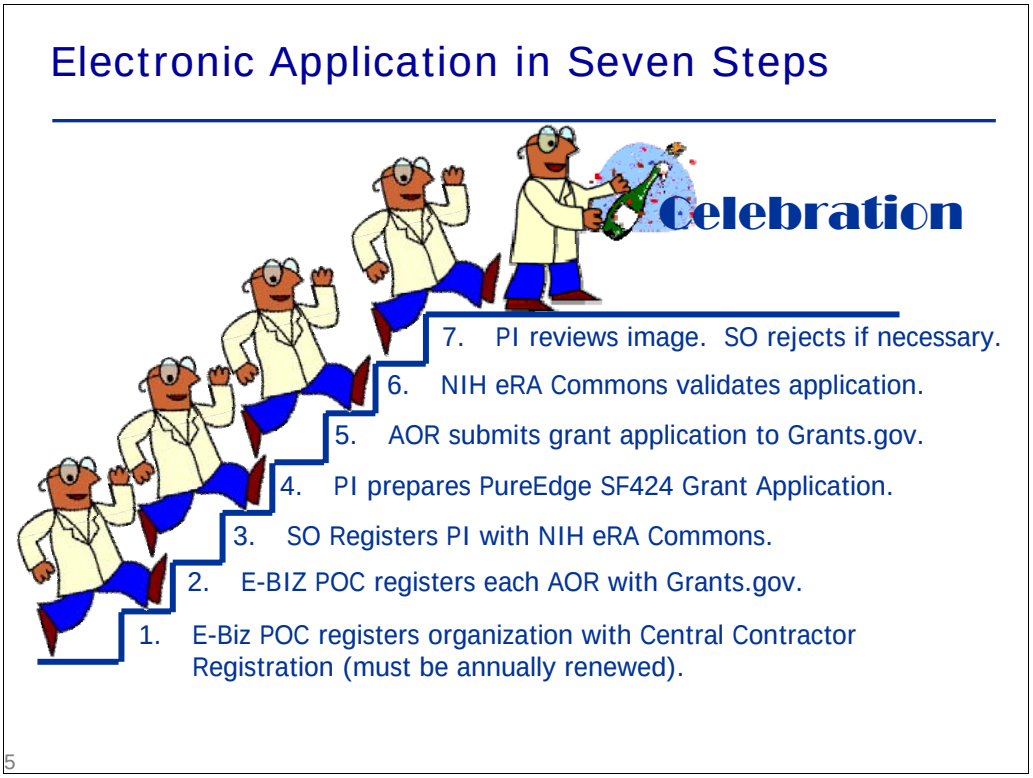
For Grants.gov and eRA Commons functions, the same person can play multiple roles but should have a separate username and password for each role. I use differently colored hats to distinguish these roles and responsibilities.

In Grants.gov, a green hat (green for money) represents the E-Business Point of Contact or E-Biz POC. The E-Biz POC is the senior-level person responsible for an organization's business activities.

A red hat (red for regulations) represents the Authorized Organization Representative or AOR. AORs have the authority to submit an application that legally binds the applicant organization.

In the eRA Commons, a yellow hat (yellow for caution) represents the Signing Official or SO. SOs perform grants management activities in the NIH eRA Commons.

A blue hat (blue for head in the sky) represents the Principal Investigator or PI. PIs prepare grant applications and direct the research.



Let's walk up what I call the seven steps of electronic application. In following slides I provide flow diagrams for each step.

For the first step, the E-Biz POC registers your organization with Central Contractor Registration, CCR, and annually renews this registration.

At step two, the E-Biz POC registers each AOR with Grants.gov.

For the third step, an SO registers your organization and each PI in the eRA Commons.

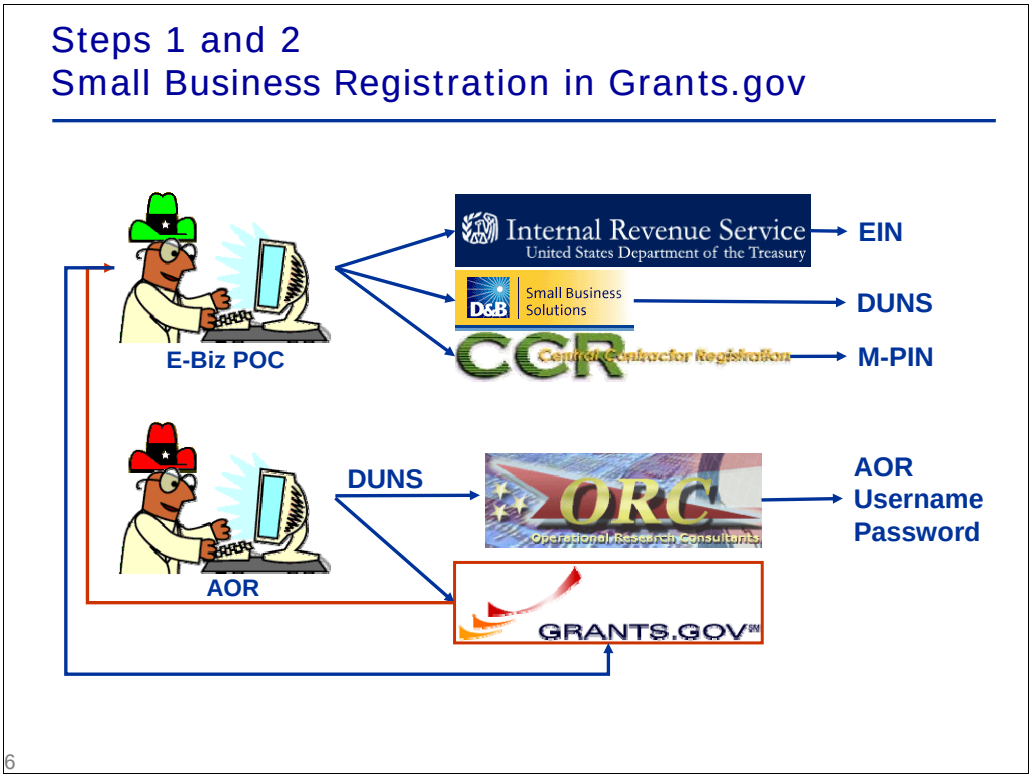
At the fourth step, the PI prepares an electronic grant application using PureEdge software.

For the fifth step, the AOR submits the SF424 application package to Grants.gov. Grants.gov checks the application for errors, and if there are none, it transfers to the eRA Commons.

For step six, the eRA Commons validates that your application conforms to NIH business rules.

At the seventh and final step, you have only two business days to carefully review the image of your assembled application. Do nothing if it is satisfactory. If it is not, only the SO can withdraw the application for corrections. A corrected application must re-enter the process at step five and is considered late if submitted after the receipt date.

People usually celebrate when they get their grant. Many applicants are now also celebrating a successful electronic grant submission.



The next four slides diagram the seven steps of electronic application. If this is your company's first time applying for NIH funding, you will need to have two registrations in place before you begin.

First, get an Employer Identification Number, an EIN, from the IRS. Second, get a DUNS number from Dun and Bradstreet. Click on any logo in this slide to go to the appropriate web sites.

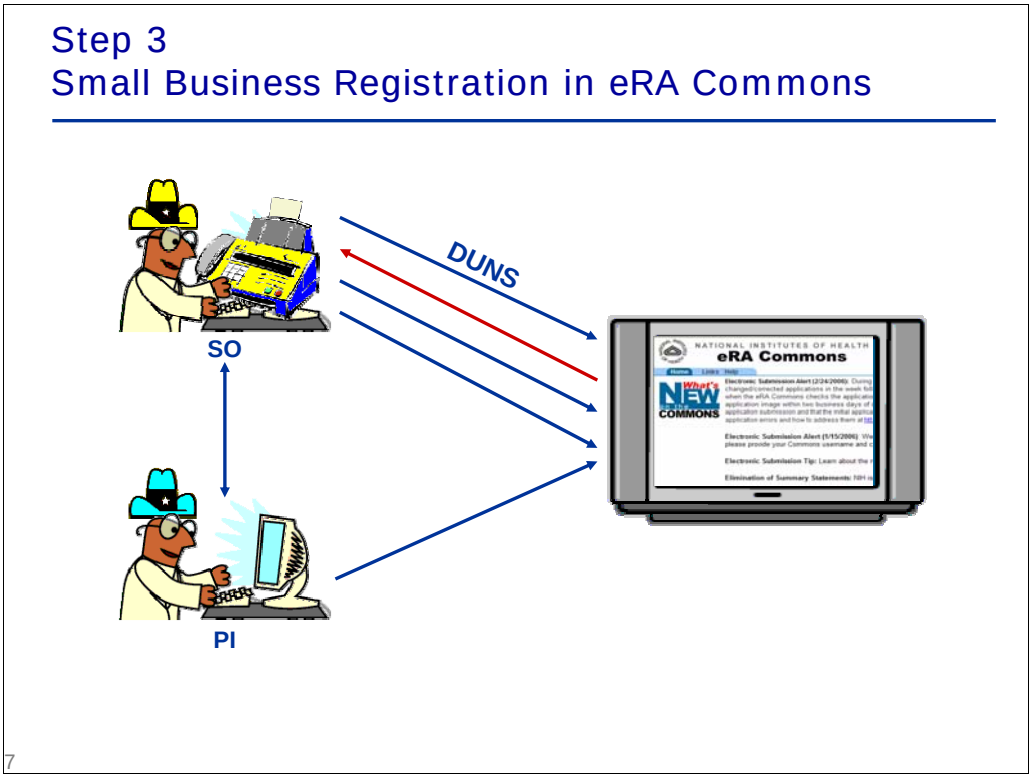
All organizations that do business with the federal government must register with Central Contractor Registration (CCR). For electronic submission step 1, the E-Biz POC registers the organization with CCR and selects a Marketing Partner ID (M-PIN) password. Don't forget to renew your CCR registration annually.

Grants.gov uses a Credential Provider, a contractor named ORC**,** to assure that people really are who they claim to be. For step 2, an AOR first registers with ORC using your company's DUNS number to receive a username and password, and then uses these to register on Grants.gov. Grants.gov notifies the company's E-Biz POC of the AOR's registration.

Next, the E-Biz POC logs on to Grants.gov to approve the AOR's registration using the DUNS number as a username and M-PIN as a password.

The AOR can now submit grant applications through Grants.gov.

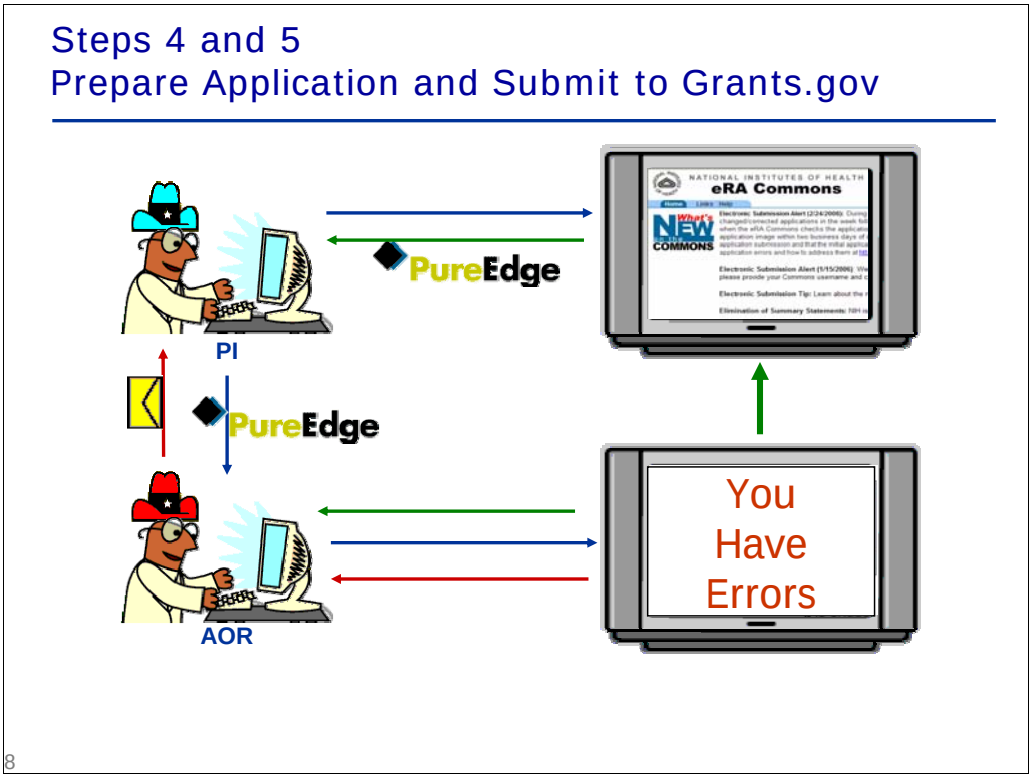
For many small businesses, the E-Biz POC and AOR are the same person.



In step 3, you, acting as the SO, use the small business's DUNS number to begin registering in the eRA Commons. Print, sign, and fax the registration documents back to the eRA Commons to complete this registration.

Ask your PI to determine if he or she has previously registered in the eRA Commons. If the PI was previously registered, you, acting as the SO, affiliate the PI with the business. If not, create a new Commons account for the PI so the PI can register in the eRA Commons.

Like the SO and AOR, the SO and PI may also be the same person. If so, they must have separate usernames and passwords for each of their roles in the eRA Commons. This is an important concept to remember.



Now to step 4, applying for a grant. As PI, you first identify a funding opportunity announcement (FOA) in the *NIH Guide*. Next you select the "apply for grant electronically" button in the FOA, and download the SF424 application package which will open into the PureEdge software installed on your computer.

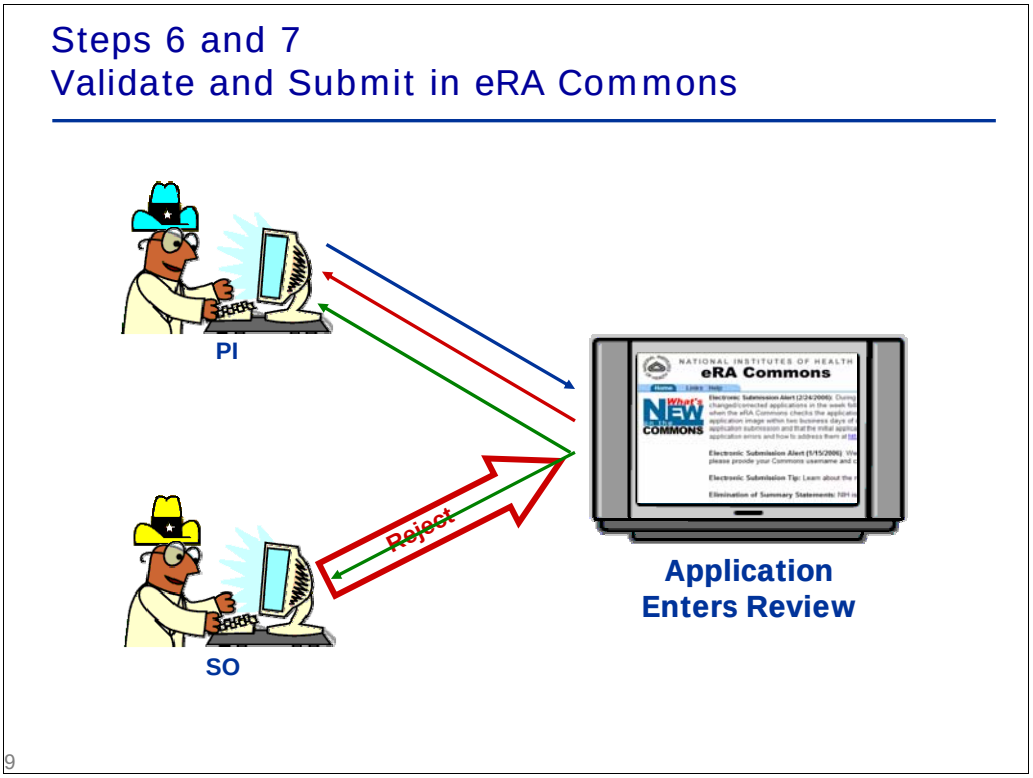
Complete and save the application package on your local drive. For detailed information and advice on completing the application, read our Checklist.

The "Submit" button only becomes functional when the application package is fully completed and saved. Remember, as PI you do not have the authority to submit your application. You must provide the completed application to an AOR who will upload it to Grants.gov on your behalf.

In step 5, you, acting as AOR, select the submit button on the completed application to send the application to Grants.gov, entering your AOR username and password. Grants.gov provides you a tracking number for your reference.

If Grants.gov identifies errors, it gives you a list that you forward to the PI to correct. The PI corrects the errors and returns the revised application package to you for resubmission.

When the application passes Grants.gov error checking, it transfers to the eRA Commons.



For step 6, log on daily as PI to the eRA Commons to view the status of your application. Validation results are usually available no more than two business days after Grants.gov accepts your application. Check with NIH Receipt and Referral staff if your Grants.gov accepted application appears lost in purgatory.

Because the eRA Commons checks NIH business rules not examined by Grants.gov, the Commons may reject your application and provide a list of fatal errors (the red arrow). If this happens, revise and resubmit your corrected application to Grants.gov following steps 4 and 5. The Commons may also provide a list of warnings that do not prevent your application's acceptance but may cause trouble later. Carefully review the warnings to decide if you want to revise your application.

When the eRA Commons detects no errors, it assembles a PDF image of your application for final review (the green arrows).

In step 7, you have two business days to view your assembled PDF application in the eRA Commons, and to withdraw it if you are not satisfied. Only the SO can withdraw the application for corrections. If you take no action within the two business days, your application automatically moves to NIH Receipt and Referral where it still may be rejected based on content. Within about three weeks, your application's IC assignment and grant number should appear in the Commons. One to two weeks later, your application's assigned IC program staff, scientific review administrator, review committee and its meeting date should also appear.

Checklists for Electronic Applications

Step-by-Step Checklists for Electronic Application

These checklists guide you through how to apply electronically using the SF 424, highlighting common problems and errors others have encountered. Print each checklist for reference.

We do not provide instructions for every form field and this is not a substitute for the official SF 424 Application Guides on NIH's Electronic Submission Web site. See Finding Help for technical support.

For more advice, see NIAID's How to Succeed With Electronic Application, one of our All About Grants Tutorials.

The checklists are new, so your feedback is invaluable. Please email deaweb@niaid.nih.gov. We will update to reflect policy changes and your suggestions. Watch Latest Updates for a summary of changes made.

Checklist Index

1. One-time Registrations Checklist. For the organization, not the PI.
2. Technical Requirements for Electronic Application Checklist.
3. Generic Electronic Application Package Checklist.
   Or, select a version tailored to your application type:
   - SBIR and STTR Electronic Application Package Checklist.
   - We plan to create R03, R21, and R34 checklists next.
4. Finalize, Submit, and Pass Validations Checklist.

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The title link takes you to our Step-by-Step Checklists for Electronic Application. The Checklists walk you through each procedure and highlights common problems and errors applicants encountered with the forms. They do not provide instructions for every form field and are not a substitute for the official but lengthy SF424 SBIR/STTR Application Guide.

The Checklists are living documents created with input from our scientific community. If you identify anything you feel would be useful for other users, please contact me. Always view the latest version of the Checklists when preparing an electronic application.

More Presentations

TOPICS

- Basics
- Choices and FY2005 Data
- Grantsmanship
- Electronic Application
- NIH Timeline

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Thank you for watching this presentation. Close this window to select another topic.